



ASTHMA MEDICINES

Asthma can be well controlled by avoiding trigger factors (see *Asthma Fact Card*) and using asthma medicines. There are four main types of asthma medicines: relievers, preventers, symptom controllers and combination medicines.

Asthma medicines are most often inhaled directly into the lungs via inhalers (puffers), on their own or via a spacer. They can also be taken as tablets, capsules or syrups. There are four main types of asthma medicines:

Relievers

E.g. *Aironir, Asmol, Epaq, Bricanyl, Ventolin*.

Relievers relax the muscles in the airways, opening the airways up to help you breathe more easily when you are short of breath.

Your asthma may not be adequately controlled if you need to use your reliever most days. (In this case you should see your doctor).

Relievers:

- Will help in an acute asthma attack.
- Do not treat the inflammation.
- Can cause a rapid heartbeat and shakiness, this is a common side effect for some people. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or asthma educator if this happens to you.
- Can be used before you exercise if exercise triggers your asthma.

Ipratropium (e.g. *Atrovent, Ipratrin*) is also called a reliever medicine. Ipratropium is not used to relieve an asthma attack as it takes longer than other relievers to reach the full effect.

Theophylline (e.g. *Nuelin*) is another reliever medicine, usually taken as a tablet. Theophylline is not used to relieve an asthma attack as it takes longer than other relievers to reach the full effect.

Preventers

Preventers stop you getting asthma symptoms as often. They decrease

inflammation and make airways less sensitive to trigger factors. Preventers are usually inhaled e.g. *Flixotide, Intal, Pulmicort, Respocort, Tilade, Qvar*.

A new type of preventer medicine taken as a tablet (e.g. *Singulair*) is now available. This may be added to your inhaled preventer to help improve asthma control.

Preventers:

- Need to be used every day, even when you do not have symptoms
- Will not stop an attack once it has started
- When first started, take time to work. You may not notice an improvement in your asthma for two weeks or more
- Should **not** be stopped, unless your doctor tells you to.

Prednisone or prednisolone tablets (or syrup) are preventers mainly used to treat severe asthma attacks. They are usually only taken until symptoms improve and can be controlled by regular asthma medicines.

Symptom controllers

E.g. *Foradile, Oxis, Serevent*.

Symptom controllers can be added to preventers and relievers to improve control of asthma symptoms. They:

- Work well for people who get a lot of asthma symptoms, even when using a preventer
- Are particularly used for night-time and exercise-induced asthma
- Work for 12 hours
- Are used regularly
- Cannot be used in an asthma attack.

Combination medications

E.g. *Seretide*.

Combination medications contain a preventer and symptom controller together in one inhaler. They:

- Save having to use two different inhalers
- Are used regularly
- Are not used during an acute attack.

Taking asthma medicines

Inhalers

Aerosol inhalers allow the medicine to get directly into the lungs where it needs to work. Inhalers include aerosol inhalers ('puffers'), autohalers, turbuhalers, accuhalers and aerolizers.

Using inhalers properly is important for good asthma control it is not as simple as it might seem. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or asthma educator to check your inhaler technique and show you devices that can help e.g. spacers.

Spacers

A spacer is a plastic chamber that fits onto an aerosol inhaler. The inhaler is sprayed into the spacer at one end, and then the medicine is breathed in from the other end.

Spacers help get the best amount of medicine into your lungs. They can also help people who find it hard to press down on their aerosol inhaler and breathe in at the same time.

Nebulisers

A nebuliser is a pump that turns liquid asthma medicine into a fine mist. The mist is inhaled through a facemask or mouthpiece. For most people, a puffer and spacer are easier and more effective to use than a nebuliser. Nebulisers are not used as frequently in acute asthma attacks as they were in the past.

Monitoring asthma

Your doctor may measure how well your lungs are working using a special test called spirometry.

You can also use a peak flow meter.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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*Pharmacy Self Care has a strong commitment to providing current and reliable health information.
The information in this card was current at time of printing.*

This checks how open your airways are using a simple blow test. Measuring peak flow and keeping a check on your symptoms helps show how well your asthma is controlled.

Self care

- Do not ignore signs or symptoms of an asthma attack. Always carry your reliever (blue inhaler).
- Controlling asthma with a preventer (and possibly a symptom controller) will mean you should need less or no reliever.
- Develop a written Action Plan with your doctor, pharmacist and/or asthma educator (see *Asthma* Fact Card).
- If you use *Flixotide*, *Pulmicort*, *Respocort* or *Seretide*, rinse your mouth out with water, gargle and spit out (do not swallow). This reduces the risk of possible mouth and throat problems, such as thrush and hoarseness.
- Check with your pharmacist and/or doctor before you stop or start any medicine, including over-the-counter and herbal products.
- If using a spacer, wash it regularly in warm water with kitchen detergent and leave it to drain and drip dry (without wiping).
- If you smoke, now is the time to QUIT. Your pharmacist can help (see *Smoking* fact cards).
- Read the *Asthma* Fact Card to find out more about asthma and how to manage it.

Other relevant fact cards

- *Asthma*
- *Smoking* fact cards

Contact

A doctor – listed under 'medical practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

To find your **Self Care pharmacist** call (02) 6283 4777.

The Asthma Foundation in your state and for **Asthma Australia** brochures call 1800 645 130.

Websites: www.asthmaaustralia.org.au
www.nationalasthma.org.au

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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